

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRESIDENTIAL VISIT BACKGROUND PAPER XV: IMPERIAL VISIT TO
THE UNITED STATES

1. PRESIDENT FORD'S MID-NOVEMBER VISIT TO JAPAN WILL ONCE AGAIN
FORCE THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE QUESTION
OF AN IMPERIAL VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES. FROM THE JAPANESE
STANDPOINT, THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARILY COMPLEX AND FRAGILE
UNDERTAKING. THE VISIT TENTATIVELY PLANNED IN 1973 HAD TO BE
"POSTPONED" DUE TO MISHANDLING AND FRICTION WITHIN THE JAPANESE
GOVERNMENT, MUCH OF WHICH WAS REPORTED IN THE PRESS.

2. THE CENTRAL ISSUE IS THE POSTWAR CONSTITUTIONAL
PROHIBITION AGAINST A POLITICAL ROLE FOR THE EMPEROR -- OR HIS
NAME BEING USED BY OTHERS FOR POLITICAL PURPOSE. MOST OF THE
PEOPLE ACCEPT--EVEN WANT--A SYMBOLIC ROLE FOR THE EMPEROR.
THEY OVERWHELMINGLY REJECT ACTIONS BY THE EMPEROR OR THE
CONSERVATIVE ESTABLISHMENT, HOWEVER, THAT EVEN HINT OF A RETURN
TO THE STATUS AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE IMPERIAL
INSTITUTION BEFORE WORLD WAR II. THE STRENGTH OF POPULAR
SUPPORT FOR THE POSTWAR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM ON THIS POINT
ACCOUNTS FOR THE EXTREME SENSITIVITY OF THE CONSERVATIVE
GOVERNMENT IN AVOIDING ANY IMPLICATION THAT A VISIT TO THE
UNITED STATES CARRIES NATIONAL POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE. AND
THE DIFFICULTY OF THE ISSUE STEMS FROM THE INEVITABLE FACT THAT
SUCH A VISIT WOULD BE POLITICALLY MEANINGFUL.

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3. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS WHICH GOJ OFFICIALS

MUST CONSIDER:

--THE EMPEROR WANTS VERY MUCH TO MAKE THE VISIT, AND
PERHAPS MAKE IT THE CAPSTONE OF THE 50TH YEAR OF HIS REIGN (1976).

--IF IT IS TO OCCUR, THE IMPERIAL VISIT CANNOT BE
DEFERRED MUCH LONGER BECAUSE OF THE EMPEROR'S AGE.

--THE EMPEROR HAS ALREADY VISITED A NUMBER OF
COUNTRIES IN WESTERN EUROPE (FRANCE, HOLLAND AND ENGLAND) OF FAR
LESS IMPORTANCE TO JAPAN THAN THE U.S.

--THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WILL HAVE MADE
HIS VISIT TO JAPAN, AND THE QUESTION OF A RETURN VISIT BY THE
EMPEROR NATURALLY ARISES.

4. IN LIGHT OF THESE FACTORS, THE TASK OF PLANNING AN
IMPERIAL VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN DELICATE AND
COMPLEX. THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN REASONS WHY THE EFFORT WAS
UNTHINKABLE, INCLUDING CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD, DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN THE U.S. AND JAPAN, AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN
BOTH COUNTRIES. UNTIL NOW THERE HAS NEVER APPEARED TO BE A
TIME WHEN CONDITIONS PERMITTED SERIOUS PLANNING.

5. THE EARLY 1973 DEBACLE IN PLANNING FOR THE IMPERIAL
VISIT SERVES AS A CASE IN POINT. IN RETROSPECT, ON VIRTUALLY
EVERY COUNT CONDITIONS WERE NOT RIGHT FOR A VISIT THAT YEAR.
THE EMPEROR'S HEALTH WAS NOT VERY GOOD--HE HAD ASTHMA--
BUT NOT SERIOUS ENOUGH IN ITSELF TO FORCE CANCELLATION OF THE
VISIT. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN WERE
GOOD, BUT INTERNAL POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN EITHER COUNTRY
WERE NOT. WE HAD WATERGATE, WHICH OBVIOUSLY WEIGHED HEAVILY
AS AN ADVERSE FACTOR, ALTHOUGH THE SUBJECT WAS NEVER
MENTIONED BY THE GOJ IN DISCUSSIONS WITH US. IN JAPAN, THE
JAPAN COMMUNIST PARTY (JCP) WHICH HAD JUST BECOME THE SECOND
LARGEST OPPOSITION PARTY, BEGAN ITS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE
ROLE OF THE EMPEROR IN STATE AFFAIRS, INCLUDING HIS STATE
VISITS ABROAD.

6. DESPITE THE STRONG OBJECTIONS OF THE IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD
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AGENCY, THE TANAKA GOVERNMENT WAS APPARENTLY STILL WILLING
TO GO AHEAD WITH THE VISIT. THE GOVERNMENT FINALLY BACKED DOWN,
HOWEVER, PARTLY BECAUSE IT OBJECTED TO FORMER PRIME MINISTER
SATO'S INSISTENCE THAT HE SERVE AS THE EMPEROR'S ESCORT IN THE
UNITED STATES, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY BECAUSE THE JAPAN SOCIALIST
PARTY (JSP) JOINED THE JCP IN OPPOSING THE EMPEROR'S
STATE VISITS, SPECIFICALLY INCLUDING THE ONE TO THE UNITED
STATES, ON THE GROUND THAT THE GOJ WAS "USING" THE EMPEROR FOR

POLITICAL PURPOSES.

7. IN LIGHT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY SENSITIVITY OF THIS
ISSUE FOR THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE, ALTHOUGH
PRESIDENT FORD COULD APPROPRIATELY RENEW IN PRIVATE THE
STANDING INVITATION OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND
PEOPLE FOR THEIR MAJESTIES TO VISIT AT A CONVENIENT FUTURE
TIME, WE SHOULD BE GUIDED BY THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT ON THE
FORM AND TIMING OF ANY PUBLIC REFERENCE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF
AN IMPERIAL VISIT. BECAUSE OF EXTREME JAPANESE SENSITIVITY
ABOUT THE ULTIMATE DECISIONS RELATING TO AN IMPERIAL VISIT,
WE SHOULD IN ANY EVENT AVOID PRESSING FOR THE RETURN VISIT
EVEN IN PRIVATE.

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NOTE BY OC/T: EXDIS CAPTION ADDED PER INSTRUCTIONS SS-O.

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